

# State of Connecticut

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## PERMANENT COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

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**Testimony of  
Natasha M. Pierre  
Associate Legislative Analyst  
Permanent Commission on the Status of Women  
Before the  
Judiciary Committee  
Monday, March 13, 2006**

**Re:**

**S.B. 439, AAC Sexual Assault**

**S.B. 443, AAC Domestic Violence**

**H.B. 5612, AAC the Department of Correction**

**H.B. 5651, AA Adopting the Recommendations of the Report of the Commission on  
Prison and Jail Overcrowding**

Good afternoon Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor and members of the Committee. My name is Natasha Pierre and I am the Associate Legislative Analyst for the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. Thank you for this opportunity to testify on several criminal justice bills before you today.

**S.B. 439, AAC Sexual Assault**

**S.B. 443, AAC Domestic Violence**

We support S.B. 439 and S.B. 443 which would provide additional protection from sexual assault and domestic violence. As you are aware, in some cases a sexual

assault is not categorized as such because of the current definition. S.B. 439 would close the loophole to ensure that actions that are commonly thought of as sexual assault are included in the definition. SB 443 would allow police officers to issue no contact orders between alleged abusers and victims until the matter is addressed in court. This is critical because many domestic violence incidents occur on the weekends or during the holidays when access to courts are limited. We urge your support of these bills.

**H.B. 5612, AAC the Department of Correction**

**H.B. 5651, AA Adopting the Recommendations of the Report of the Commission on Prison and Jail Overcrowding**

PCSW supports the proposal in H.B. 5612 to use telephone revenues to expand inmate educational services and reentry program initiatives. We also support the proposals in H.B. 5651 to appropriate funds for discharge planning for women and social supports for inmates being released in the community with psychiatric disabilities, or mental health and substance abuse disorders.

Unfortunately, the number of women in prison has increased dramatically in the past decade. In 1990, 595 women were incarcerated in Connecticut. As of January 2006, the number of women incarcerated increased over 100% to 1,296 women.<sup>1</sup> Many women are incarcerated due to issues relating to their own poverty and abuse. Some engage in prostitution to support drug habits. Others are victims of domestic violence, incest and sexual assault who may commit crimes related to the abuse or may be living out lives shaped by the history of the violence directed against them.

There is a critical need for discharge planning. PCSW conducts workshops at York prison, and we have heard all too often about women serving their full sentence at York without the benefit of supervised parole, transitional supervision or probation and no place to go upon release. They have no families or support systems to return to, or just do not want to return to the environment they were in before their incarceration. Women who have been released without a discharge plan often end up in homeless shelters or in situations that lead to their reentry into the prison system. Community supports for inmates, who are released, paroled or on probation will reduce the probability that those released from prison will recycle back into the system. The availability of such support services will not only save the state money, but will also help those who are released to become productive members of society.

We do not know the impact of the proposal in H.B. 5612 to repeal the statute that mandates that men and women be confined separately, however, we are concerned about his provision because many imprisoned women have histories of trauma, abuse and sexual assault. We believe it is important to ensure that services for female prisoners are provided in a gender and culturally appropriate manner.

Thank you for your consideration of these matters.

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<sup>1</sup> CT Department of Correction Statistics, *Incarcerated Population By Status and Gender, and January 1, 2006 Population Statistics*, accessed 3/06 at [www.doc.state.ct.us](http://www.doc.state.ct.us).

